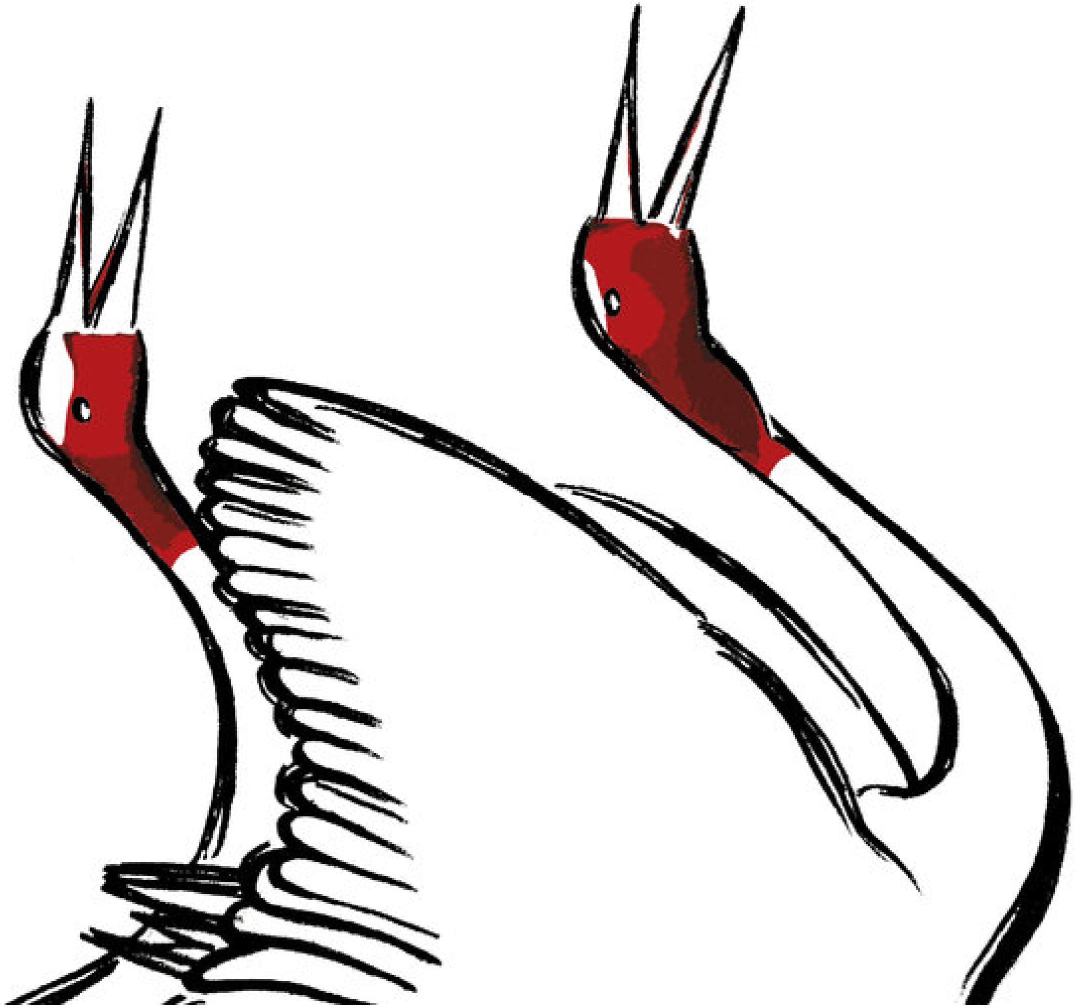
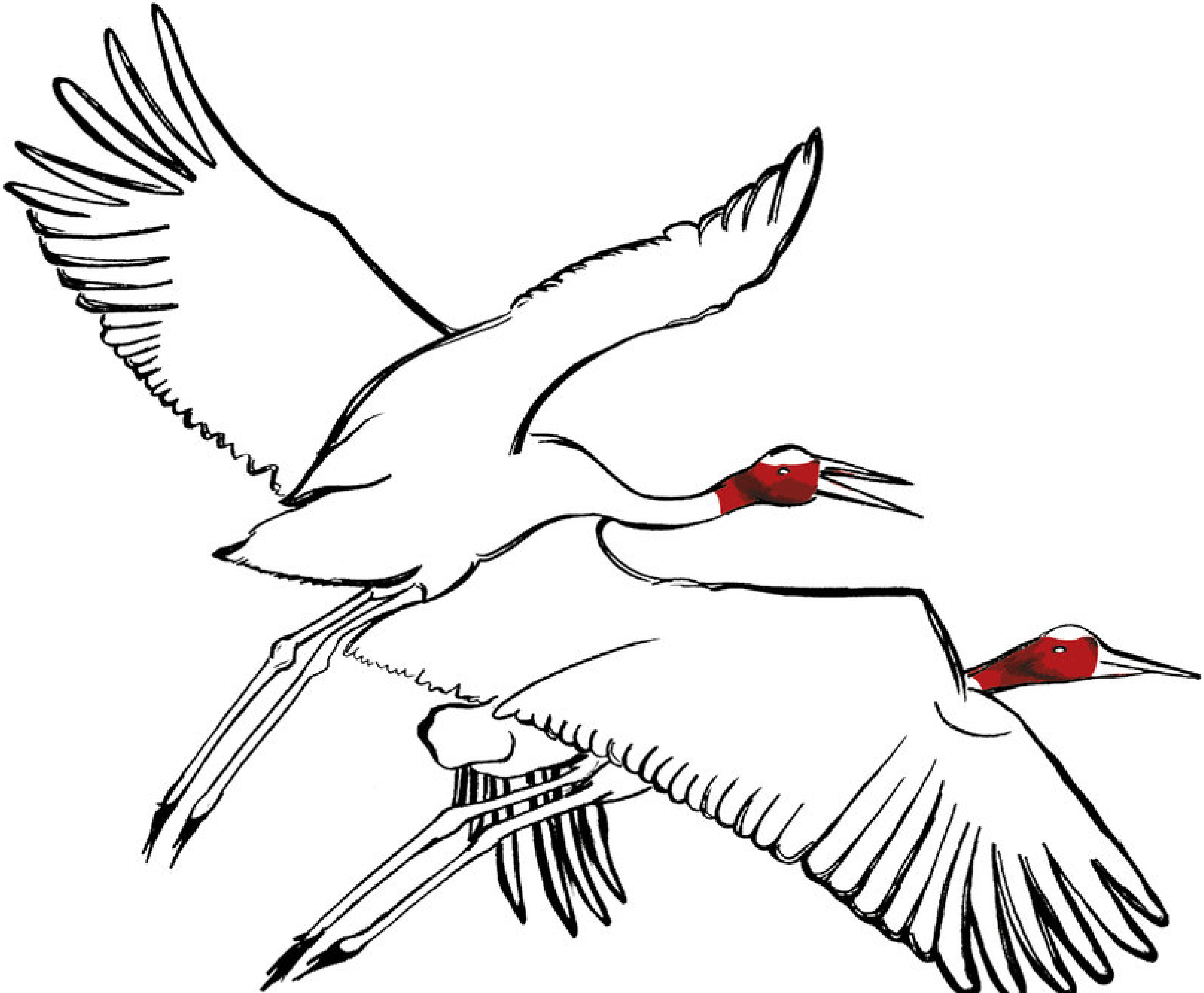


One Summer Afternoon

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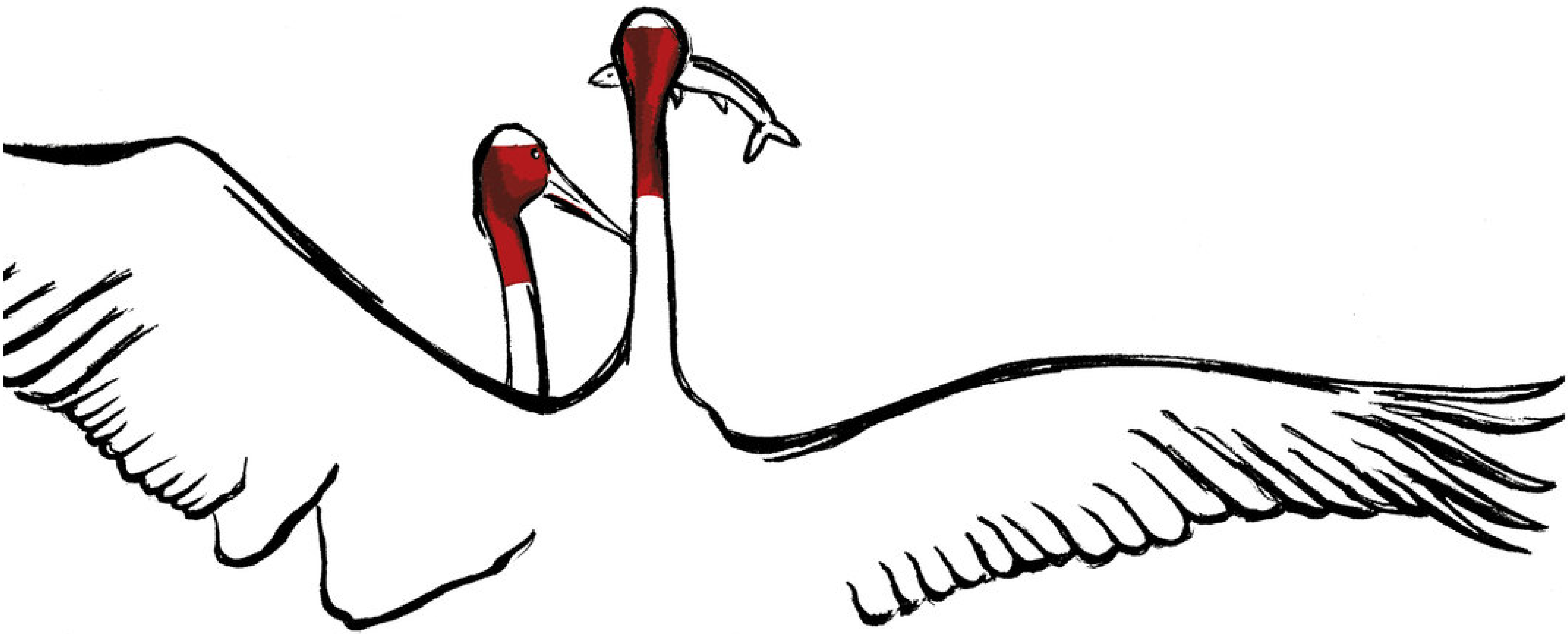
PRATHAM BOOKS
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Level 4



The large pond on the south-eastern side of our village was home to many species of birds and animals. Along with waterfowl and herons, there also lived a pair of cranes. They trawled from one end of the lake to the other looking for tasty food.

We often spotted them with desperately flailing fish held in their beaks.



The water level in the pond fell every night and a small mound of earth that emerged was their home for the night. This mound was a safe haven as nocturnal predators such as fox, wild cats and mongoose could not reach them easily.





The two cranes called
at the break of dawn.
This was the signal for people
to rise and begin their day.



I had never been able to see the pair of cranes at close quarters. Whenever we approached them, they would immediately move away with long-legged strides.

Their bright red beaks and the velvety glimmer on their necks looked enchanting. Sometimes, we would run after them. When this mood seized us, they either moved to some place that was beyond our reach, or took a short flight that left us far behind in their wake. Often they would perch on the mound of earth inside the pond.







At the end of the monsoon, we spotted a little crane along with the pair. He marched proudly between the long-legged ones, matching them step for step. I was utterly fascinated by the little crane. I would try very hard to get close to him but the older pair kept me firmly at bay.

One day, some of us boys from the village entered the pond to pluck some lotus flowers.

It was the middle of the afternoon. Everything seemed silent and still in the lazy heat of the sun. The people who worked their fields from dawn would go home by the afternoon.



We spotted the pair of cranes in the pond, playing with the baby crane. All of us took it into our heads to chase the little crane.





As the pair of cranes ran pell-mell, they lost the little crane somewhere.

All of us wanted to catch the little crane but he eluded us. He was not able to fly as yet but so swiftly did he move that none of us were able to keep up. He moved left and he moved right and we couldn’t catch him. We were so intent on pursuing him that none of us stopped to think that even if we did manage to catch him, how would he survive without his parents?



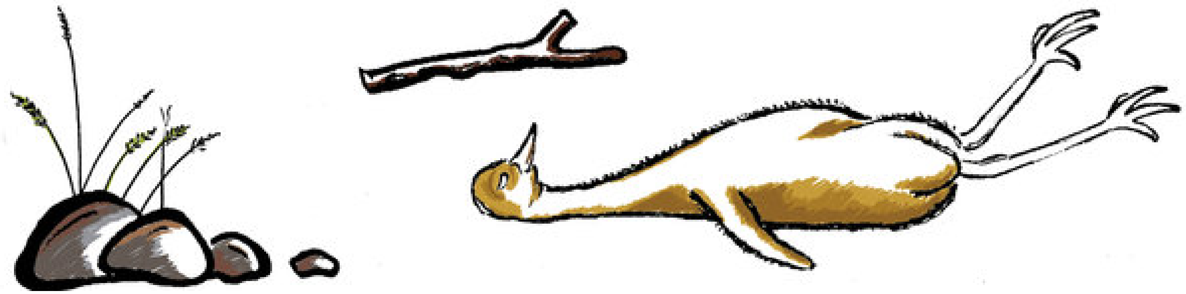


We ran and we ran among the stalks of millet in the fields, hell-bent upon catching him.

The hot sun beat down on our heads so that they fairly clicked and crackled. The little crane somehow managed to emerge from the field of millet. One of us aimed a stick at him. He fell down instantly!

The moment he fell, we all froze in dismay. We ran to his side and tried to revive him. Someone tried to prop him up while someone else stroked his feathers. Another boy straightened his thin legs. One of us ran to the pond and brought some water in cupped palms and dribbled it on his beak. But he did not rise again.





His parents combed the boundary of the millet field and searched desperately among the stalks, calling all the while. They took short flights for an aerial survey and continued to call but to no avail. Their voices grew dim as they kept up their anxious search.

We all stood in a huddle under the jamun tree and berated our friend as we watched this sad display of love from the little crane's parents. Finally, they found their baby.

As soon as they saw him they stood facing each other and spread their wings as if to protect the little one and gently stroked him with their beaks. They stood and wailed and mourned their little one for a very long time, shielding him with the canopy of their wings. Sometimes they would raise their beaks heavenwards and cry. They would flap their wings and raise their voices together. Sometimes they cried separately. Their pain turned into tears dripping from our eyes.



As the evening shadows lengthened, bereft of hope, the pair of cranes left.





I have never forgotten this incident from my childhood. Perhaps the crane family showed me how we must love all living beings without wanting to possess them.

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One Summer Afternoon
(English)

Children in the village grow up in close proximity with other living beings. Read this touching story of how they learn some important life lessons.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.